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RETHINKING LESBIAN MOTHERHOOD

Amy Hequembourg
Lesbian Motherhood: Stories of Becoming
 New York and London: Harrington Park Press, 2007, 191 pp., ISBN 978-1-56023-687-0

Hequembourg proposes a refreshing new approach to the depiction of lesbian motherhood. She presents a well-informed review of relevant studies and a cogent delineation of the social and political context of lesbian motherhood. Hequembourg suggests that it is time to move beyond dichotomizing discourses that have tended to stunt thinking about the nature of lesbian motherhood by locating it within reductionist conceptualizations that portray it as a discrete state to be contrasted with 'normal' motherhood. Such discourses, which cast lesbian motherhood in terms of sameness/difference, assimilation/resistance, emerge from either/or debates that almost inevitably exude the sense of a need to defend the legitimacy of the status of lesbian motherhood. They tend also to lead researchers into rather sterile and intellectually shallow waters where the goal of the research effort becomes to prove the null hypothesis, that is, to demonstrate no differences on comparisons between children growing up in lesbian-led families and those growing up in more traditional constellations. While such studies can serve a useful function within legal contexts, Hequembourg argues that they fail to engage with the full spectrum of individual experiences of growing up in lesbian-led families and are inherently problematic on methodological and conceptual grounds.

Hequembourg has begun to develop a promising approach, based on the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987). This represents an attempt to escape from legalistic or dichotomizing discourses, by acknowledging discourses of sameness and difference but conceptualizing them as occurring within a more dynamic system. The picture painted is of women constantly negotiating away from and towards hegemonic discourses according to varying social contexts and relationships. The most 'conforming' women (i.e. those where couples have adopted traditional 'male'/'female' gender roles) are not necessarily consciously negotiating new positions. However, Hequembourg portrays them as constantly creating social identities and statuses that evolve across differing social situations. This creates an overall impression of alternative discourses as gyrations around hegemonic discourses, with the constant

process of becoming consisting of micro-movements around and about macro-discourses. Such a conceptualization contests a view of women as entrenched within static confrontational discourses and so points the way to a far more subtly nuanced understanding of the nature of lesbian motherhood. To support her new ways of thinking about lesbian motherhood, Hequembourg provides illustrations drawn from thoughtful analysis of the narrative accounts provided by lesbian mothers. These self-portrayals provide evidence of a variety and subtlety that seriously challenge the validity of more popular discourses that tend to produce a more limited, stereotypical view.

While it may have been useful if the difference between micro- and macro social contexts had been distinguished and defined more clearly and there was a tendency at times to repeat rather than to elaborate, Hequembourg's attempt to develop an alternative conceptual framework is commendable. In my view, this book is an extremely valuable addition to thinking about lesbian motherhood.

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A THIRD WAVE: ABOUT THE POLITICS OF PROCLAIMING A 'NEW' FEMINISM

Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie and Rebecca Munford, eds
Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration, expanded 2nd edn
Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 310 pp., ISBN-13 978-0-230-52174-2

The second edition of *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration* interrogates the wave metaphor while seriously engaging with the arguments of self-identifying third wave feminists. This revised collection of essays opens with a new foreword by Imelda Whelehan and concludes with an afterword by Jane Spencer. This second edition also contains an interview with Luce Irigaray and newly commissioned chapters that explore a broad range of issues: transgender feminism (Susan Stryker), postfeminism (Amanda Lotz), Polish feminism (Agnieszka Graff), post-colonial feminism (Anastasia Valassopoulos) and pornography (Melanie Waters).

As the section headings indicate, the overarching themes of the collection centre around the issues of 'Generations and Genealogies' (Part I), 'Locales and Locations' (Part II) and 'Politics and Popular Culture' (Part III). In the introduction, the editors Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie and Rebecca Munford voice their concerns about the discourse that contrasts different feminist generations. They argue that a generational approach to differences within feminisms risks establishing a divisive rather than dialogical framework. The issues of generations and genealogies are also addressed